

I. Introduction

- A. Happy Easter. Thank you for joining us today in this 'tiny' auditorium.
- B. For my Easter message today, I would like to talk about this verse from the Bible:
“For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive.” 1 Corinthians 15:22.
- C. The Bible forges a link between the resurrection of Jesus and the resurrection of His people. Because He lives, we shall live. When God raised Him from the dead, God raised all who are united to Him from the dead, too.
But that’s getting ahead of things. Let me back up a little bit.

II. My Big Fear

- A. I grew up in a very conservative, fundamentalist church. God loved us, but barely. I got the idea He had to force Himself to love us. When I say conservative I mean, for us, it was a sin to dance, drink, play cards, go to movies, listen to rock and roll or to any music with drums. We sang hymns and choruses with a piano and organ. And, once in a while—I’m not kidding—a gut bucket.
- B. A gut-bucket is a hillbilly bass guitar. It’s made of a big silver bucket, some twine and a broomstick. I think the bass guitar must have been evil, too. We sat in hard wooden pews.
- C. I knew Jesus died for me. I knew He rose again. In fact, our church had a cross on it. We made a big deal about the fact that the cross was empty. I thought any church that didn’t have an empty cross must be all messed up.
- D. I’m just telling you how I grew up, very conservative.
- E. So, picture an adorable, little Italian boy growing up in a fundamentalist church. All I wanted to do was play baseball with my friends, but week after week I was dragged to church.
- F. Deep inside, I truly wanted to please God, but I didn’t think I could. I heard all about Judgment Day and I dreaded that day. The biggest reason I dreaded that day was a Bible verse my church laid on me over and over again.
 - 1. *“Whatever you have said in the dark will be heard in the light, and what you have whispered behind closed doors will be shouted from the housetops for all to hear!”* Luke 12:3, NLT
- G. Imagine shouting your deepest, most embarrassing secrets from a rooftop, posting them on YouTube or printing them in the church bulletin. Some small-town newspapers publish the names of men who have been arrested for picking up hookers.
- H. “Shouted from the housetops for all to hear.”
- I. Worst of all—though now I know better—I thought that verse was about Judgment Day. I was absolutely sure that, on judgment day, God had a gigantic, cosmic sized, plasma TV screen and when it was my turn, God would call my name. I would come forward (in my imagination, naked) and in front of you, my friends, my family, Sunday School teachers and the whole universe, I was convinced God was going broadcast all my sins, all my secrets, all the stuff I wanted so desperately to hide on that screen.
 - 1. All the world would see it.
 - 2. God would shake His head in disgust.
 - 3. I would cringe in humiliation and shame.
 - 4. Then, finally, God would grudgingly, scarcely, barely, let me slink into heaven.
- J. The net effect of all this upbringing was a kind of Christianity I can compress into one single word.
- K. PERFORMANCE.
- L. I was convinced that all the world was a stage and I was giving the performance of my life. At the end of it, I would stand, not before a Loving Savior, but before a celestial Simon Cowell and he would say, “That was dreadful! The whole thing was a mess!”

III. The Pharisees

- A. That performance-orientation was like a weight on my young shoulders and I performed with the best of them.
- B. Here’s what *my* performance looked like.
- C. When I was in my early twenties, I was a part-time student at the University of Illinois and a part time clerk at a very large 24-hour grocery store in a very bad neighborhood.

- D. On weekends I worked the graveyard shift. I worked Thursday, Friday and Saturday overnight from 10:00 p.m. until 7:00 a.m. Because 'performance' was so important, I never let up at church. This was my schedule:
1. Saturday night, I worked till 7 a.m. I had breakfast and headed straight for church. There, I helped clean and set up chairs. I also helped with the music, very amateurishly, Sunday school and then church in the morning. I went home, slept a little and then went back to church for the Sunday night service.
 2. On Tuesday, I ran Pals, our church's club for boys.
 3. On Wednesday, I joined in at prayer meeting.
 4. On Thursday, I drove my little sister and her friends to Chums, the girls' club. I stayed to help, drove them home and went to work.
 5. On Friday, I helped with the high school group.
 6. Then I worked Saturday night into Sunday morning and started the week all over.
- E. I refrained from drinking, dancing, swearing (mostly), playing cards, and movies (mostly). I sacrificed dating, the prom, lust and sex. I sacrificed any college or career choice outside the Christian bubble. This roster of 'sacrifices-I-made-for-Jesus' defined me. It also defined a whole generation of Christians. It also scared off a whole generation of non-Christians.
- F. I am not proud of all this. In fact, I'm embarrassed by it. Not because I'm against being involved in church. I'm not. What embarrasses me was my *motivation*.
- G. Why was I working so hard? Why was I pedaling so hard? *Because I was performing for Jesus*. I desperately feared having all my bad stuff shouted from the rooftops. I wanted God to accept me, to like me, to praise me.
- H. We even made a hero out of one church leader who boasted that he was 'busy for Jesus' at church *while his wife was in the hospital delivering their first child*.
- I. Not Christianity's finest hour.
- J. We were pedaling as fast as we could.
- K. Why did we make these sacrifices? I can't speak for anybody else, but I know why I did, guilt. *I was sacrificing myself so God would forgive my backlog of sins*. I criticized the theological position that required penance to get rid of guilt. What I didn't realize was that my whole life was a penance.

IV. The Pharisees

- A. Without intending it, I had become a living example of an episode in the life of Jesus. In Matthew 23, Jesus condemned a group of religious leaders called Pharisees. Their teaching crushed people's spirits. The Pharisees epitomized everything bad in religion. They spoke forth the voice of conformity, the voice of condemnation, the voice of superiority.
- B. And to me, they were the voice of performance. Perform, or else. Listen to what Jesus said about them:
1. *"They crush you with impossible religious demands and never lift a finger to help ease the burden. Everything they do is for show. On their arms they wear extra wide prayer boxes with Scripture verses inside, and they wear extra long tassels on their robes. And how they love to sit at the head table at banquets and in the most prominent seats in the synagogue! They enjoy the attention they get on the streets, and they enjoy being called 'Rabbi.'"* Matthew 23:4-7 NLT
- C. Here's the part that jumped out at me, "Everything they do is for show." That was me. I was pedaling as hard as I could for God on the outside, but I didn't feel one bit closer to Him on the inside.
- D. I don't know how you were raised. I don't know what you believe. But if you feel even a little bit of what I feel, then I'm so glad you're here today, on Easter Sunday.
- E. Because the resurrection of Jesus proves something about God and how we relate to Him.

V. The Resurrection of Jesus

- A. So, for everybody here today who is performance oriented or achievement oriented; for everybody who feels as if the harder you pedal, the more you slip away from God, let me ask you some simple questions.
1. What if God isn't looking at your performance at all?
 2. What if it doesn't matter?

3. What if God has decided Jesus would stand in your place and that He would, by Himself, accomplish all the performance God ever required?

4. What if God would measure you, not by your own performance, but instead by the performance of Jesus Himself?

B. The reality is that you and I have as much chance of getting a good performance review from God as we do of raising ourselves from the dead. We can't measure up to His standards. In fact, every day that goes by, we only prove that we fail Him over and over again.

1. When Jesus died on the cross, God permanently erased all my bad performance.

2. When Jesus rose from the dead, God permanently gave me and you credit for all of HIS good performance.

C. This is what the Bible teaches from cover to cover. This is what I have come to believe. This is what most people think is crazy and way too easy. His death erased all my sins and His resurrection earned a big stack of merit badges I get to wear.

VI. God's view of performance

A. When I was in fifth grade, at Oriole Park School in Chicago, I had a very strict teacher. She was severe, very old school. I don't remember her smiling at all. She kept us in line.

B. Every time one of us kids misbehaved, Mrs. Senne pulled out a stack of index cards. She called them Anecdotal Record Cards. I thought she said 'Antidotal' but, later, I got it straight. Every time I did something wrong, Mrs. Senne wrote it down on my Anecdotal Record Card.

C. She promised me that this card would follow me all my life. When I went to high school, they would have my Anecdotal Record Card and all my bad stuff would go with me. When I went off to college and into the job market, I would be haunted all my life by my fifth-grade Anecdotal Record Card with all the bad stuff I've ever done all my days.

D. Well, dear Mrs. Senne, let me tell you what God did with my anecdotal record card.

- God shredded:
- Report cards
- Job performance reviews
- Tax returns
- Tax audits
- Nasty notes and emails
- Credit card bills
- Bad credit report
- DMV record
- Driving record

E. And, Mrs Senne, the only thing that haunts me today is why I let you scare me for so long.

F. God says He casts all our sins behind His back, into the depths of the sea, never to be remembered against us again.

G. Because the simple fact that Jesus died and rose again means my bad performance doesn't count against me, and my good performance doesn't count for me. It's not about me.

H. When I stand before God, not naked, but clothed in the righteousness of Christ; when I stand underneath that cosmic TV screen and it's time to shout from the rooftops the truth about me, the only thing God will show on that screen is a Savior who died for my sins and rose again for my justification.

I. It has never been about me; it has always been about Jesus. My life, my heaven, my eternity, my salvation, my forgiveness, my right standing with God, my adoption into God's family, my acceptance, my pardon and all God's outpouring of love and affection for me depend entirely on Jesus. It's about Him.

J. All I have to do is believe in Him, trust Him, receive Him and make Him my Savior.

VII. Your Choice

A. Let me finish by going back where we started. You have a choice to make.

1. *"For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive."* 1 Corinthians 15:22.

B. The old way, Adam's way, was based on performance and all it results in is death.

C. The new way, Christ's way, is based on His performance and His way brings life.

D. Did you help Jesus rise from the dead? Not at all. You don't help Him raise YOU from the

dead either. It's all His power, His grace, His love.

- E. Here's your choice. You can choose to stand before God based on your own performance or on Jesus' performance. Which do you want? Have you ever told God?
- F. I'm asking you to make a mental and spiritual shift today, a shift from trusting your own performance to trusting Christ alone. To trust your own performance is to die. To trust in the risen Christ is to live forever and ever.
- G. It's your choice. I want to help you make that choice, to make that spiritual shift, right here, right now, today.